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CRITICAL REVIEWS OF RECENT BOOKS

(Goldstein, K. *Human Nature in the Light of Psychopathology*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1940. Pp. 258.)

REVIEWED BY LOUIS OSGOOD KATTSOFF

Probably the greatest pitfall in any attempt to describe "human nature" is the danger of attributing to man qualities which are the result of the peculiar age and civilization he inhabits. This danger and the recognition of the number and calibre of the men who have been unable to avoid it, are responsible for the swing to the opposite extreme of denying that there exists any human nature at all. That man has a definite structure and behaves in definitely "human" ways is evidenced by the fact that we can and do distinguish between animal and human psychology, that we have a vast array of facts concerning "human" behavior and so on. We may not be able to define precisely what the human characteristic is, yet our ability to recognize and differentiate human behavior indicates the existence of defining characteristics or (perhaps) the existence of defining systems of such characteristics. It matters not whether one call such characteristics *tendencies* or *capacities* or what not. Tendencies or capacities are related to definite structural or functional characteristics. One would hardly expect a fruit-fly to have a tendency (or capacity) to solve differential equations; or a rattlesnake to have a tendency to walk as a biped does. It would appear that a tendency as the result of a definite structural or functional characteristic is a capacity-to-do-something. The problem of describing human nature seems to be the discovery of these capacities, essential to man, as they are used in the milieu in which the organism finds itself.

Although the failure to isolate any characteristics unique to man, may indicate that no such characteristic exists, yet it may imply that the uniqueness of man lies in the concatenation of capacities—in their peculiar gestalt. It is not merely that "Each individual's behavior is caused in part by certain tendencies which he has in common with all members of the species (or in common with all save certain special spiral eccentrics or monstrosities), in part by tendencies peculiar to his sex, in part by tendencies peculiar to his

ancestry, in part by the stage of development or maturation which he has reached, in part by tendencies peculiar to the general ways of life 'culture' of his land and time, and in part by the circumstances which characterize his own peculiar life-history" (Thorn-dike, E. L., *Human Nature and the Social Order*, N. Y. 1940, pp. 12-13). The organization of these tendencies and the kind of active unit is also important.

The complexity and inter-relatedness of human behavior and the unitary feature of the human organism have resulted in a challenge to orthodox, analytical methods of investigation. Such methods tending as they do to isolation of phenomena, do not seem to be satisfactory techniques for the investigation of human behavior and much less satisfactory for the determination of the "nature of human nature." The result of this challenge has been the development of attempts to approach the problem through "holistic" methods. Gestalt psychology, and its off-spring topological psychology, are illustrations of these approaches.

It was the feeling of the necessity for a new approach and of the difficulty of knowledge in biology and psychology that were basic to Dr. Goldstein's book, *The Organism* (reviewed by this author, *Journal of General Psychology*, 1940, pp. 447-454). The present volume, *Human Nature*, is an important supplement to *The Organism*. Delivered as the William James Lectures at Harvard University in 1937-1938, it discusses the holistic method in more detail and attempts a closer definition of the basic concepts of Goldstein's approach which this reviewer felt were inadequately explained in *The Organism*: (a) *Actualization of the organism*, (b) *coming-to-terms with the environment*, (c) *the essential capacity of human nature*.

It is true that a great many experimental situations consist in the creation in the organism of pathological situations under controlled and easily observed conditions. This is especially true in experimentation with animals other than human. In animal experimentation, this consists in the destruction of various parts of the animal or in creating diseased conditions of various organs so that their capacities are definitely impaired, or they are caused to function in an isolated fashion. This is what Goldstein has in mind, for when discussing the pathology of the nervous system he says:

Pathology consists in the destruction of some regions of the nervous system, as a result of which the latter is divided into

parts, each of which functions in isolation from the rest"
(p. 15).

When a pathological condition exists, the organism must compensate in some way for the destruction. As a result the activity of the organism will be directed towards achieving some form of behavior, which will accomplish what the destroyed regions performed. Examination of behavior under pathological conditions, *if properly interpreted*, will, as a consequence, offer valuable indications about non-pathological behavior which may be overlooked under non-pathological conditions. But, it is to be noticed that the element of *interpretation* is of more significance here than it is in ordinary investigations. Two interpretative aspects are involved if one desires to infer something about human nature from the behavior of an organism with pathological conditions: (a) the correct type of pathological condition must be inferred, (b) the pattern of behavior that *would* be present where there is no pathological condition, must also be inferred. This means that it is assumed that definite pathological conditions give rise to definite kinds of behavior (i.e., that modification follows certain laws) and secondly, that it is possible to infer from present pathology to conditions that would be present if the pathological conditions had not occurred.

They (i.e., pathological phenomena) are performances which have been modified according to definite laws and they become intelligible if one takes into consideration the characteristic alterations which illness produces (p. 35).

It is one thing to use behavior under pathological conditions to describe and infer the type of disease present. It is a much more difficult task to infer the non-pathological condition. This latter task, demands, as Goldstein ably proves, a holistic approach. This is evident from the fact that behavior resulting from pathological conditions may go off in very surprising directions, and unless one has a total picture of the individual misleading inferences may result. Thus although pathological behavior may differ functionally from non-pathological behavior, yet the complete picture of the organism may make it possible to infer the non-pathological tendencies of the organism; provided always that there exists a basic "nature" of the organism.

It is clear that if we do not allow ourselves to be overpowered by a hypothesis explaining a type of behavior so that we attempt to

explain all behavior by this hypothesis, the consideration of pathological situations may be of great value in understanding human nature. It must be admitted that Dr. Goldstein in this book seems to succumb to this danger. One learns with some surprise that the essential capacity of human nature is *abstract behavior*. There is no doubt that many pathological conditions involve a modification of the ability of the individual to perform abstractions. But one must hesitate to accept the fact that all such conditions involve such a modification. What happens to Dr. Goldstein's logic is illustrated by his discussion of the patient who has what Goldstein calls a "horror vacui."

"If," says Goldstein, "you wrote a letter on the blackboard without a line, he (i.e., the patient) took the chalk, drew a line under it and immediately could read it" (pp. 105-6).

But, Goldstein argues, the patient is not experiencing or reacting to emptiness since that would involve "an abstract attitude, in which our patients, as we know, are lacking. This abhorrence of a vacuum is caused by the fact that empty space is not an adequate stimulus" (p. 106). But surely to realize the need for a line to fill space involves a high degree of abstraction!

We have labored the point of pathological conditions because of the necessity for differentiating between the *pathological* and the *abnormal*. To be normal, for Goldstein, means to be in a state in which there is a "harmonious actualization" of certain factors (p. 235). This "harmonious actualization" may be prevented either by impairment—which is pathology—or by exaggeration—which is abnormality in a narrow sense. Thus all pathological behavior is abnormal behavior but not all abnormal behavior is pathological. Normalcy involves specific "constants" and definite "preferred" modes of behavior. The task of science is to determine the constants by the observation of the preferred modes of behavior which characterizes human nature (p. 183). Where the constants are undisturbed and the preferred modes of behavior are freely carried through, human nature is "actualizing" itself and the individual's life is "ordered." The abnormal does not involve destruction but, in its limited sense, denotes a deviation from a state of balance. In abnormal conditions the organism has exaggerated some aspects of its behavior or some capacity. It is therefore, in a sense, in a state of disequilibrium which hinders its ability to "come to terms" adequately with its environment.

Normal life is ordered life because the equalization process takes place in relation to the tasks of the whole organism. This is not the case under experimental and pathological conditions" (p. 15).

And again,

... the essential element of disease is the shock to the existence of the individual caused by the disturbance of the well-regulated functioning of the organism by the disease (pp. 5-6).

It is necessary to look more closely at the holistic method which is to be used in the investigations indicated by these remarks.

If the organism is a whole and each section of it functions normally within that whole, then in the analytic experiment, which isolates the sections as it studies them, the properties and functions of any part must be modified by their isolation from the whole of the organism (p. 10).

This is the major objection to atomistic investigation. Goldstein, and all gestaltists, agree that the atomistic method of investigation has made available a great deal of information. But especially for wholes which are not merely sums of their parts such investigation cannot lead to ultimately final knowledge. This objection to the usual types of cognition and the analytic method of the natural sciences, posits a separation between part and whole—or between atomism and holism. This dichotomy is basically misleading. The ordinary method of analysis may be said to have as its goal the separating—out of small wholes. A reflex arc may be part of the organism but it is a whole in itself. Likewise the organism may be said to be part of the locale in which it is found. As for the objection to isolating processes, it must be remembered that whenever we *study* an object, the very process of studying it isolates it. The real questions involved seem to be two: (a) What are the limits of isolation? (b) Is synthesis possible without previous isolation?

In this connection, it may also be remarked that Dr. Goldstein studies *pathological* phenomena to determine what constitutes human nature, and by his own definition pathological phenomenon are partial processes.

It often appears that the real difficulty in atomistic methods lies in the fact that the investigator restricts himself to the particular item he is investigating. He tends to overlook the connections and

relations of that part with the rest of the whole. In other words, the difficulty seems to lie in the failure to determine what is the largest significant unit for the given problem. Whether the unification of the separate data requires a method of cognition essentially different from other methods is a moot question. Goldstein believes it does.

We can arrive at it (i.e., the biological concept) only by using a special procedure of cognition—a form of creative activity by which we build a picture of the organism on the basis of the facts gained through the analytic method, in a form of ideation similar to the procedure of an artist. . . . The German poet Goethe . . . has called this procedure of acquiring knowledge *Schau* . . . (p. 24).

In any case the techniques of such a procedure need careful analysis and description if they do differ from other procedures. To construct a schema of a building or of a pattern of behavior one seems to follow the same procedures of scientific method as in the problem of the analysis of water. The difference seems to lie in the fact that the knowledge of the elements of sensation does not allow us to predict with a fair degree of accuracy since what happens in sensory experience is influenced by mental sets, etc. This would seem to mean that there exists further problems and that one must expand “the horizon” involved in any investigation. Holistic procedures call to the attention of investigators the fact that analytic procedures are only half the picture and that it is necessary to remember the temporarily “bracketed” factors.

In seeking biological knowledge “we try to discover the actual gestalt of the intrinsic structure of this building, a gestalt through which some phenomena may become intelligible as belonging to a unitary, ordered, relatively constant formation of a specific structure, and other phenomena may become intelligible as not belonging to it” (p. 23). For it is apparently this “unitary, ordered, relatively constant formation of a specific structure” that defines human nature. The “actualization of the organism” would then appear to mean the maintenance of this specific structure in existence (p. 85). And, since Goldstein says, whatever guarantees the existence of an organism belongs essentially to the organism (p. 173), those capacities and factors which do tend to preserve the organism are of the essence of human nature. Seeking in the observation of

pathological behavior for that capacity which is injured by the pathological condition, yet which is necessary for the organism to have intact if it is to actualize its unique potentialities, Goldstein finds one of the most essential capacities of human nature to be the ability to abstract. This is not merely something which belongs to every human being, enabling him to "vary his perspective and to orient his conception of the world by a variety of frames of reference" (p. 216) but also differentiates man from animals (p. 83) and, in fact, is the highest capacity of the human being (pp. 67-80).

The difference between abstract and concrete performances is best indicated by Goldstein's own words:

In "concrete" performances a reaction is determined directly by a stimulus, is awakened by all that the individual perceives. The individual's procedure is somewhat passive as if it were not he who had the initiative. In abstract performances an action is not determined directly and immediately by a stimulus configuration but by the account of the situation which the individual gives to himself. . . . Abstraction represents, rather, a preparation for activity; it involves an attitude, i.e., an inner approach which leads to activity. . . . In the concrete situation, action is set going directly by the stimuli; in the situation involving the abstract, action is begun after preparation which has to do with a consideration of the whole situation . . . (pp. 59-61).

The implication seems to be that scientists, and of course philosophers, who possess the highest powers of abstraction are *ipso facto* the highest forms of human beings. As to the fact that this capacity differentiates man from animal a reference to the behavior of Köhler's apes and of rats in experimental situations seems to indicate some ability to perform abstraction, certainly in the sense of "preparation for activity."

Apart from, perhaps, arbitrary interpretation on the part of the observer, the only other methods of differentiating experimentally between concrete and abstract behavior would be (a) introspection, (b) the time lapse between stimulus and reaction. Both of these would involve great difficulties. Perhaps Goldstein has in mind some method for differentiating between these two types of behavior which enables him to say that animals do not act in this way, but he does not explain it in this book.

It is clear that a tendency to actualize oneself is bound to come into conflict with other individuals' tendencies of like nature. Hence,

Goldstein seems to be led to a position which necessitates a doctrine of "the war of all against all." To avoid this and meet the fact that there does exist society, etc., Goldstein introduces another tendency to self-restricting behavior (pp. 202-3). Thus we have "naturally" a tendency to realize one's capacities—giving rise to encroachment—and a tendency to restrict the former tendency in a sort of enlightened egoistic way. Not merely that, but because this tendency toward actualization is primary, conflict, shock, and anxiety are essential to human nature (p. 112).

The normal individual balances the abstract and concrete, the two tendencies, and meets the shocks and conflicts (p. 66). It would appear that the capacity to balance these attitudes, etc., might be as essential to human nature as the attitudes, etc., and perhaps Goldstein should introduce a "tendency to balance."

Although Goldstein has given an interesting and stimulating analysis which throws valuable light upon a difficult problem, one feels often that he has attributed to human nature qualities peculiarly like those of the scientist living in a society which involves anxiety, shock, uncertainty, encroachment (aggression?), etc. One wonders whether in a society in which encroachment were submerged and coöperation stressed, coöperation would not be found essential to human nature. Goldstein leaves the term "actualization" vague even in this book. Is *every* act of an organism an "actualization"? If it is, our problem seems to become amorphous. If it is not, then which acts are and which are not and how do we recognize them? Is violence self-actualization? It does tend to preserve the organism. Is hatred of the essence of human nature? It, too, tends to preserve the organism. Shall we consider the demagogue who plans a riot, to have more human nature than the participant in the riot who acts upon the immediate stimulus? And, from a scientific point of view we ask: "*What does this offer us in the way of control of behavior?*" "*What new problems does such a hypothesis open for us?*" "*How does it solve the problem of delinquency to say that delinquency is due to the tendency to encroachment?*" A sound hypothesis not merely enables us to explain a set of data but also to control and predict. Observation is an essential part of scientific method and the insistence upon the observation of pathological instances in sound. But we cannot end with observation and hypothesis.

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